

CLEMENTS-DE SIBOUR HOUSE
Georgetown
1539 Twenty-ninth Street, Northwest
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS DC-832
DC, GEO, 230-

PHOTOGRAPHS

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FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CLEMENTS-DE SIBOUR HOUSE

HABS No. DC-832

Location: 1539 29th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

Present Owner: Smith and Elizabeth Bagley

Present Use: Private residence

Significance: Jules Henri de Sibour, one of Washington's most important architects of the twentieth century, renovated the interior of his house, creating grand spaces reflecting his Beaux-Arts training and the tastes of Washington's wealthiest. According to Pamela Scott in Buildings of the District of Columbia (Oxford Press, pages 43-44, 1993), de Sibour settled in Washington, D.C. in 1911, "where for thirty years he was one of the city's most prominent architects, designing a number of elegant mansions in academically correct American versions of French seventeenth and eighteenth-century styles, including houses for Clarence Moore (HABS No. DC-267) and Thomas T. Gaff." Both of these houses became embassies, and one of de Sibour's other commissions and perhaps his most commanding is now the headquarters for the National Trust for Historic Preservation (HABS No. DC-265). In each of the buildings the touch of master revival architect is obvious.

In addition to this house's architectural significance, it derives further importance as an indicator of how much Georgetown had changed by the early twentieth century. Unlike the early great houses, which offered views towards Georgetown harbor-- and no doubt these views were equally important to their nineteenth- and twentieth-century purchasers, this house faces east and offers no views to the harbor even from south facade windows as the house is also not on an elevated site. So for a very successful and presumably well-off architect, the appeal of the house must of been the prestige of a Georgetown address and the potential the site offered to build grand interior spaces.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: the northern part of the house was erected between 1840 and 1847 as indicated in an increase in value from \$300 in 1840 to \$1400 in 1847. A separate dwelling of unknown date stood next door (at 1529 29th Street) until Jules de Sibour bought it and renovated it in conjunction with his own residence at 1539 29th Street; as a result, the house at 1529 29th Street disappeared, swallowed up by Sibour's.

2. Original and subsequent owners: Lot 832 of lots 806 & part of 805 of Beall's lots 266 & 267 in Square 1267 (old square 97), 70 feet on Q Street and 80 feet on 29th Street

- 1804 Deed (Liber M-61)
Thomas Beall of Geo
To
Thomas Sim Lee.
- 1819 Will (no citation)
To
Six grandchildren.
- 1837 Deed (WB 63-201) (sold for unpaid taxes)
John Cox, Mayor
To
Bennet Clements.
- 1840 Deed (WB 79-285)
Heirs of Thomas Sim Lee
To
Bennet Clements.
- 1847 Deed (WB 134-201)
Bennet Clements
To
Samuel Clark et ux Ann H.
- 1867 Will (Will Book 12 folio 88)
To
Jane Clark (daughter?).
- 1904 Deed (2842-99)
Janie Carlton, sole heir of Guy Carlton, who was devisee under will of Jane Clark
To
Lollie Baden Carlton, widow of Guy Carlton.
- 1917 Deed (3988-164)
Lottie (or Lollie?) Carlton, et al.
To
Emily Brown.
- 1921 Deed (4564-130)
Emily Brown

- To
Margaret Clagett de Sibour.
- 1923 Deed (4902-343)
Margaret Clagett de Sibour
To
Jules Henri de Sibour.
- 1923 Deed (4902-343) (But apparently Sibour remained owner until he defaulted in
1935. Perhaps he used his residence as collateral, see below)
Jules Henri de Sibour & wife Margaret Clagett
To
Jerome O. Hughes.
- 1935 Deed (6874-289) (Sold default trust of de Sibour)
American Security & Trust Co.
To
Charlotte A. Engel.
- 1935 Deed in Trust (6874-291)
Charlotte A. Engel
To
National Savings & Trust Co.
- 1940 Deed (7465-263)
National Savings & Trust Co. under deed in trust from Charlotte A. Engel
To
Prew Savoy and wife Lyla T.
- 1948 Deed (8693-137)
Prew Savoy and wife Lyla T.
To
Royd R. Sayers and wife Edna
- 1950 Deed (9261-462)
Royd R. Sayers and wife Edna
To
Homer Morrison Byington and wife Jane McHarg.
- 1956 Deed (no citation)
Homer Morrison Byington and wife Jane McHarg
To
Edward F. Hamm, Jr. & wife Joy F.

ABOVE CHAIN OF TITLE FROM PEABODY ROOM, GEORGETOWN BRANCH OF
THE D.C. PUBLIC LIBRARY

1967 Deed (28228, Liber 12831 folio 066)
Edward F. Hamm, Jr. et ux
To
Charles Andrew Sullivan et ux.

ABOVE TRANSACTION OF THE RECORDER OF DEEDS OFFICE

1984 Deed
H. McCarthy
To
Smith Bagley.

ABOVE TRANSACTION REPORTED IN WASHINGTON POST

3. Builder, contractor, suppliers: unknown
4. Original plans and construction: unknown

5. Alterations and additions: On a 1925 building permit (#863, issued July 28, 1925) Jules de Sibour, listed as owner, architect, and contractor (although above chain of title shows him selling the property in 1923, at least on paper) gets permission to erect two new additions with brick walls and have a garage built within the structure. As he stated in a letter requesting a setback variance, accompanying the permit application, de Sibour had acquired the frame house at 1529 29th Street, adjacent to his house at 1539 29th Street and he wanted to build on the foundations on 1529 29th Street, using concrete block. An attached diagram showed de Sibour building two wings south of and attached to 1539 with one wing fronting on 29th Street and the second wing being behind (east) of the south projection of 1539 29th. While that plan differs from the present configuration, it is most likely that the present configuration was created by de Sibour and not by a subsequent owner. The 1925 insurance maps shows 1539 29th Street as extending farther north than it did in earlier maps and the property appears with no projections on the north. In sum, it is assumed that de Sibour's sketch attached to the building permit did not reflect the addition as built.

According to former HABS historian Bryan Green, "The interior of the house was completely renovated by the current owners, Smith and Elizabeth Bagley. All surfaces have been altered, including floors, wall surfaces, wall treatments, stair railings, and many new architectural elements, including all of the fireplaces on the ground story, have been introduced. All surfaces (interior and exterior) have been recently repainted with a new color scheme (predominately pink), leaving little original building fabric. Among the many substantial alterations are a swimming pool introduced beneath the southernmost three-bay unit. A two-

story addition to the rear of the structure – erected without building permits – was the subject of a lawsuit and was demolished in 1990.” (page two of draft HABS documentation). On September 25, 1984, the Commission of Fine Arts recommended that the District issue a “permit for resurfacing of exterior walls. Existing stucco to be removed. Existing window surrounds to be temporarily removed for new stucco surface. Re-application of window surrounds and duplicates on Q Street will occur in conjunction with flashing. Surround moldings shall have returns. Shutters shall be operable.” (files of the Commission of Fine Arts)

B. Historical Context:

If anyone of even local importance owned 1539 29th Street before de Sibour it is not known, and it is also unlikely given that the two houses that become 1539 were small houses on small lots. De Sibour’s importance as an architect is hard to exaggerate. Many of the most notable buildings of the twentieth century, especially in the DuPont Circle area are the creation of De Sibour. That de Sibour also had his own construction firm suggests that despite any pretensions he might have been expected to have --- the architect as artist--- he was also a businessman and not shy about it. Another important or at least interesting owner were Dr. and Mrs. Royd Sayers. Sayers had been a senior executive in Harold Icke’s Department of the Interior, but he and his wife are interesting for a different reason. They obviously bought houses based on their architectural or social significance. In the 1930s they had owned the Federal style Alexandria house famous as the boyhood home of Robert E. Lee (HABS No. VA-707). The current owners have been the subject of several newspaper articles as Smith Bagley has been a democratic fund-raiser and his current wife was the U.S. Ambassador to Portugal. Smith Bagley, like Sayers, also collects prominent houses. His first wife and he previously owned the Robert Todd Lincoln House (Laird-Dunlop-Lincoln House, HABS No. DC-630)

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The Clement-de Sibour House stands in marked contrast to the majority of houses and mansions in Georgetown. Usually executed in brick, with Federal period details, these houses are mostly narrow structures with the entrance in the end bay, and these mansions are wider and symmetrical, set on large (for an urban setting) parcels of landscaped lawn. Clement-de Sibour fills a small site without any lawn, is not brick, is not federal, is not narrow and its facade emphasizes symmetry above all else. In its strident symmetry it reflects the Beaux-Arts training of its owner, architect, contractor Jules Henri de Sibour, and to a high the degree the exterior treatment reflects an interior symmetry of balanced spaces to either side of an interior courtyard and entrance hall. This house is much more important for its interior, particularly the grand drawing room, which runs the depth of the main block of the house, and its theatrical courtyard, which is the hub the house is organized around, than its exterior. Despite the east’s facade’s recessed, trabeated arcade, three bay entrance, the facade reads as a flat, with mostly applied ornament, and a lack of a convincing architectonic

quality.

2. Condition of fabric: The house and furnishings are meticulously maintained.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions: The house is nearly square with approximately 70 foot frontage along 29th Street and slightly less along Q Street. But the latter includes the garage, so the Q Street facade, which is clearly the secondary facade as it lacks any detailing besides the applied window lintels, is much shorter in terms of habitable space.

2. Foundations: Brick and stone.

3. Walls: The walls added by de Sibour are concrete block and presumably the older sections of the house have brick walls. The entire house is covered in stucco. A thin, raised horizontal band runs along the first and second floors at the height of the top of the window, just below the lintel.

4. Structural system, framing: Presumably, the house is of load-bearing masonry construction, presumably with heavy timber framing.

5. Porches: Three front steps lead up to a landing covered in brick laid in a chevron pattern. The rear door also has a brick covered landing.

6. Chimneys: The house has three chimneys along the south wall. Although there is a fireplace in the north side for the drawing room, the chimney is not visible from the street so it is possible that it is not a working fireplace and there is no chimney.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is a six paneled door with two recessed circles in the lock rail. Sidelights and fanlight, with keystone, surround the door. The door is flanked by tall French doors capped by pediments. As this entrance bay is recessed behind flanking wings, there are four tall square columns in plane with the wings, in front of the entrance bay. While the entrance door is clearly Federal revival of the twentieth century, the rear door, with sidelights above raised panels and a row of lights above the door, might be early to mid-nineteenth century. This door has the same shallow pedimented lintels as the windows have. Recent French doors with side lights and fanlight open off the north side of the breakfast room. Roll-down garage door is at the west end of the Q Street facade.

- b. Windows and shutters: The windows are six over six, with slight wooden sills and pedimented lintels (with cornice), flanked by louvered shutters. The windows on the rear facade vary in that there are no shutters and the jambs beneath the pediment are interrupted forming a

square beneath the pediment to either side of the window frame. These squares are reminiscent of eared window or door surrounds. Also on the rear facade, there is a long strip window illuminating the kitchen.

8. Roof :

a. Shape, covering: Standing seam, metal gable roofs top the two wings to either side of the main facade, and the ridges run parallel to 29th Street. Along Q Street, a gable runs parallel to that street. The center courtyard is covered in a glass roof.

b. Cornice, eaves: A dentiled cornice runs along the 29th Street facade. Above the cornice for the three part central bay, there is a balustrade with a vaguely Chinese Chippendale detailing between the plinths. The entablature below this balustrade has glyphs within the architrave, and the entablature is supported by columns (and two pilasters) with composite capitals, with acanthus leaves.

c. Dormers: None

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. Basement: Stairs from the courtyard lead down to the first level of the basement, directly beneath the courtyard, which is an exercise room with sauna and bathroom. Half a story lower is a pool, with mirrored walls and columns, below the drawing room.

b. First floor: The front door opens onto the entrance hall which is dominated by bifurcated stairs at the opposite end of the hall. Beyond the stairs is the courtyard with an arcade of Richardsonian Romanesque columns forming the rear (west) wall of the courtyard. According to Bryan Green, "...the house is significant for the incorporation into its inner courtyard of a colonnade salvaged from the only remaining structure in the District of Columbia designed by the firm of H.H. Richardson, the Warder-Totten House. The colonade is significant as that house was razed in 1923 and two years later reconstructed at 2633 16th Street N.W. The Warder-Totten house is now derelict." (HABS draft report) Beyond the courtyard is the service wing consisting of garage, kitchen, and breakfast room. The courtyard is flanked on the north by the drawing room and on the south by dining room, and in front of the dining room is the library. A bathroom with doors to the dining room and entrance hall is a L-shaped space between the dining room, entrance hall, and library.

c. Second floor: not inspected, but consists of bedrooms and offices.

2. Stairways: The bifurcated, open-well, open-string stairs consists of seven steps up to the landing where the stairs split to ascend to the second floor. The first run of stairs ascends to

the west, the second runs (ten steps each) go to the north and the south. For the first run, wrought-iron balustrades with a single spindle per tread flank the steps. Each spindle has a base and cap formed of back to back concave shapes, and a roughly heart-shaped form at the middle of the spindle. The second runs of stairs have the balustrade continued on the outside edge, but have neither balustrade nor handrail on the inside. The stringer is decorated with a simple s-curve painted to look like marble. In the courtyard along the east side, the balustrades are again used; along the open well side of the steps from the entrance hall to the courtyard and along the open well of the stairs from the courtyard down to the exercise room and pool below.

3. Flooring: The entrance hall has tile floors, while the courtyard and dining room have marble floor coverings and the drawing room floor is wooden with most of the surface in the drawing room covered by an oriental rug. The library has wall to wall carpet, with an oriental rug on top. The entrance hall and dining room have similar patterns of large brown marble squares set off by small white marble squares or borders.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Paneled plaster walls in the drawing room with modillions supporting a crown molding of two plain soffits. The dining room has padded walls, covered with fabric and plaster ceilings with dentil molding supporting a two-part frieze. The library is wood paneled, including the crown molding, and with a plaster ceiling. The courtyard has plaster walls. The entrance hall has painted plaster wall with wooden baseboard and chair rail.

5. Openings

a. Doorways and doors: Most interior doors are paneled two leaf doors, while between the drawing room and courtyard they are two leaf glass doors.

b. Windows: The windows in the entrance hall, library, dining room, and drawing room are covered in heavy drapes hung from a valance. The drapes cover simple early to mid twentieth-century wood surrounds of no particular distinction. The jambs have very limited, shallow half-round molding. The courtyard has windows on the first and second floor that are exterior windows of six over six sash, French windows, or in the case of the window on the east facade, over the stair landing, a round arched window with a fixed fanlight and French windows below. The French windows face the dining room (south facade) and French doors face the drawing room side. On the west facade, above the Richardsonian arcade, a round arched window with movable lower sash, echoes the transplanted arcade and the larger window opposite it. The first floor windows to either side on the arcade have interior louvered shutters on the other side of the windows, in the pantry and kitchen. On the south second floor of the courtyard there balcony, with Doric columns. Two glass doors, with perhaps eighteen lights, open onto the porch from the east and west, while two double sash windows look out onto the balcony.

6. Decorative features and trim: The first floor is a formal ensemble of rooms, suited to large-scale entertaining or dinner parties. Consistent with this formality is the richly decorated

wall and floor treatments, such as the marble floors in the entrance hall and dining room, and the wall treatments in the dining room and drawing room. The library, while much warmer than the other rooms due to its wood paneling, is still an elegant, formal space. In that room, along with the drawing and dining rooms, carved stone fireplaces reinforce the sense of elegance and formality. In the library the mantel frieze, of variegated marble, has a seashell boss and the mantel shelf curves echoing the projection of the scallop. In the dining room, the veined white mantel suggests the Federal period with its fluted pilasters supported rosette imposts flanking a frieze with a carved flower in the center. In the drawing room, the fireplace jambs are consoles supporting a frieze with glyphs. The three fireplaces appear to be of the twentieth century, most likely dating to de Sibour's ownership of the house. The seashell motif of the library is repeated in open concave china cabinets in the west wall of the dining room between the door into the library. Another decorative features already discussed, the balustrade also no doubt dates to de Sibour.

7. Hardware: Nothing noteworthy

8. Mechanical equipment: Forced hot air with vents in the floor and air conditioning with vents high on the walls.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces east on 29th Street and with the exception of the recessed entrance bay, it offers a continuous facade on 29th and Q Streets. With the exception of a narrow passage west of the house and a wider space north of the house, the house occupies the entire lot. The rear space and a small space off the breakfast room are enclosed by walls, with gates.

2. Historic landscape design: At the most, it is possible that in the nineteenth century there might have been somewhat larger yards between the houses, but to suggest landscaping seems a stretch of the imagination.

3. Outbuildings: The only other structure is for the air-conditioning units, which were originally mounted on the top of rear two story structure. According to a newspaper account, that structure was built for the Bagleys without the requisite permit process. The structure is no longer there.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The records of the Commission of Fine Arts, National Archives (building permits), and the files of the Peabody Room and the Washingtoniana Room of the D.C. Public Library were the sources of the information.

Prepared by: William Lebovich, Architectural Historian, June 2000

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Georgetown Documentation Project was sponsored by the Commission of Fine Arts and undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) of the National Park Service. Principals involved were Charles H. Atherton, Secretary, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and E. Blaine Cliver, Chief, HABS/HAER. The documentation was undertaken in two phases. The summer 1998 team was supervised by John P. White, FAIA, Professor of Architecture, Texas Tech University; and architecture technicians Robert C. Anderson, Boston Architectural Center; Aimee Charboneau, Tulane University; Irwin J. Gueco, The Catholic University of America; and Adam Maksay, United States/International Council on Monuments and Sites (US/ICOMOS) architect from the Transylvania Trust. Historic research was initiated by Bryan C. Green, historian, Richmond, Virginia, during this summer. The summer 1999 team was supervised by Roger S. Miller, architect, Alexandria, Virginia, and architecture technicians David Benton, The Catholic University of America; Edward Byrdy, The Catholic University of America; Irwin J. Gueco, The Catholic University of America; and Clara Albert, US/ICOMOS architect from the Transylvania Trust. The project historian, and author of the written reports, was William Lebovich, architectural historian, Chevy Chase, Maryland. The photography was undertaken by Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, and James Rosenthal, photographic assistant.